The Capitol Hill Monitor

Volume 4 Issue 2 (1998) February 1998

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY REVISES RADIO PLAN

Prince George's County completed a revised version of its "Two-way Radio Communications Plan" in January. The plan calls for the county to finish the initial procurement of its existing 866-869 MHz trunked radio system and have it installed and tested with an estimated completion date of August. The cost to finish this portion of the procurement is $575,000 and it has been funded. This figure includes mobile radios purchased for general county government vehicles that "need immediate relief from the over crowded situation" on the shared local government [155.94] and public works [159.18] channels.

Also proposed for an August completion is an upgrade of the 866-869 MHz trunked system to a multiple-site simulcast with an integrated multiple-site controller, system manager and system controllers. "This upgrade," states the plan, "will provide APCO 16 compliance for public safety trunking systems, simplify system operations and programming, and provide equipment that is mandatory for the next level of upgrade." This upgrade has been funded at a cost of $1.42 million.

While not fully funded, the plan's next step is the purchase of additional UHF-T band (494-496 MHz) trunking upgradeable radios for police and sheriff and 800 MHz radios for corrections. The proposed completion date is also August, but this has not been funded in the $3.2 million estimate. The county purchased 300 of the required 1900 portables for the police during FY 1998.

Also not funded but proposed for August completion is the installation of a redundant dedicated microwave and fiber-optic network linking the county's transmitter sites at a cost of $1.5 million.

Proposed for completion by June, the plan calls for the addition of at least three 10-channel 866-869 MHz trunked system antenna sites to supplement the two existing sites in District Heights and Cheltenham. The site locations have yet to be determined and may cause further delay. The plan says the county will be unable to use the WSSC's water tanks because the tanks are not high enough. The county needs to cover more area with fewer sites to save money.

Once the new sites are operational, the plan says the county will purchase an adequate number of mobiles and portables to move the fire department off its existing UHF-T band channels onto the 866-869 MHz trunking system, which will then be fully capable of supporting portable radios with a high degree of reliability. The estimated $4 million for the three sites and fire department upgrades has not been funded. The plan, however, proposes that it be finished by June.

The next step, estimated at $2.5 million and proposed for completion by December, is the construction of a five-channel five-site UHF-T band simulcast trunked radio system that would use the former fire channels. The integrated 866-869 MHz multi-site controller and the dispatch console equipment controller will be upgraded to act as the controller of both the 866-869 MHz and UHF-T band trunked systems. The goal is to allow for "seamless inter-system communication" between the two frequency bands. The end result is what the county hopes will be seamless cross-band / system trunking for public safety and other county agencies.

Proposed for completion by June of next year, the plan calls for the addition of the police department's existing 10 channels to the UHF-T band trunked system. The trunking capable police and sheriff radios, hopefully purchased in the meantime, will be upgraded to fully functional UHF-T band trunked radios. As each police district leaves its conventional channel, that channel would be incorporated into the UHF-T band trunked system. The costs for this upgrade is estimated at $2.5 million.

With a proposed completion date of December of next year, the plan calls for the purchase and installation of mobile data terminals (MDT)

and automated vehicle location (AVL) equipment for police, fire and sheriff vehicles with appropriate upgrades to the CAD system. This would cost $8 million.

If the procurement and installation of all equipment is actually funded and takes place, the county will have two trunked systems operating as one integrated system. The 10-channel 866-869 MHz trunked system will accommodate the fire department and non-public safety radio users, as well as the proposed MDT/AVL systems. The county's police, sheriff and corrections departments will use the 15-channel UHF-T band trunked system.

The county plans to continue to use the existing UHF "med" channels (462-463 MHz). No mention was made of any continued simulcast of 46.12 or other fire channels. The sheriff will retain one of its VHF channels for "long distance communications with transport vehicles." Channels abandoned by the county will either be re-utilized for data, paging, retained in reserve or turned back to the FCC for re-assignment.

To date, less than $2 million of the estimated $23.7 million price tag of this complete system has been funded. Money troubles are severe in the county, and the upgrades will likely take longer than the plan proposes --if at all.

"The major disadvantage of embracing trunking technology," the plan warns, "is that to get equivalent coverage of the same area(s) from the same site(s) the amount of equipment required is roughly equal to the conventional system's cost times the number of trunking channels in the system, plus the associated network equipment required to tie all of the sites together."

Other jurisdictions in the area are a testament to this, the plan states, noting that Anne Arundel County has invested more than $15 million to support less than 2000 radios, Baltimore County has invested nearly $50 million on its system and Montgomery County expects to spend nearly $35 million. "We are of the opinion," concludes the 13-page plan, "that Prince George's County can spend significantly less to achieve results similar to these other counties."

The county has licensed itself on the following 31 800 MHz channels. Three conventional channels are already in use:

854.6875 corrections, transport and perimeter security
855.7375 sheriff, courthouse security
866.2375 corrections facility security.

The trunked system is operational with its two sites in District Heights and Cheltenham and utilizes Ericsson/GE's Enhanced Digital Access and Control System (EDACS). It is currently analog.

North system: 866.1, 866.6 control, 867.0875, 868.4625 and 868.9625.

South system: 866.1875, 866.7875 control, 868.2375, 868.4875 and 868.7625.

National channels:
866.0125 calling, 866.5125 tac 1, 867.0125 tac 2, 867.5125 tac 3, 868.0125 tac 4.

Washington Council of Governments channels:
866.3625 police mutual aid, 868.5125 COG1, 866.8375 COG2, 867.2375 COG3, 867.4875 COG4, 866.8625 COG5 and 867.7625 COG6.

These **six channels** are licensed by the county for mobile use only and were originally designated as the Baltimore regional interservice channels:
866.1625, 866.4125, 867.3125, 867.3375, 867.6625 and 867.9625.

BALTIMORE CITY'S 800 MHZ SYSTEM

Antenna site work for most of Baltimore's Astro digital trunked radio system has been completed according to Mike Agner and Ron Chalk. Dispatcher training is scheduled to start with field testing for fire and EMS units planned for March through July. The fire department is estimated to be fully online in July with 48 talkgroups (three 16-channel banks). Police and other agencies will follow in about two years. Five of the 154 MHz channels are expected to simulcast for a year or so.
The city will also install mobile data computers that feature a mapping system and provide information on buildings, hydrant and box locations and pre-fire plans. The police department will use the computers as well.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY REALIGNS POLICE RADIOS

With about two years to go before the county's proposed trunked system is fully operational, the police department has decided to reconfigure its channel plan. Here is the new patrol car channel plan. Radios assigned to SWAT, narcotics, sheriff and other specialized units may differ. Thanks to Dave "Doc" Litz and Scott Glazer for keeping us informed!

494.7125 [156.7]
1 Rockville Dist (primary)
495.4125 [114.8]
1 Rockville Dist (Great Falls simulcast)
494.8625 [156.7]
2 Bethesda Dist
494.9125 [156.7]
3 Silver Spring Dist
495.4125 [156.7]
3 Silver Spring Dist (Burtonsville simulcast)
495.3125 [156.7]
4 Wheaton Dist
495.3375 [156.7]
5 Germantown Dist
490.7125 [156.7]
5 Germantown Dist (data)
495.3625 [156.7]
6 Down County Alternate
495.3875 [156.7]
7 Up County Alternate
495.2375 [156.7]
8 Rockville City Police
490.4375 [156.7]
9 Tactical
488.3625 [100.0]
10 Takoma Park Police 1
488.3875 [100.0]
11 Takoma Park Police 2

SKI SCANNING

by Ralph Johnson
(johnson@cpcug.org)

A modern ski resort offers the skiing scanner enthusiast many opportunities to listen in on its operations. The first and most visible monitoring opportunity is the ski patrol. As the members patrol the slopes they need radios to call for help, to coordinate logistics for injured skiers, ask for help to control rowdy skiers and to report current slope conditions.

Second, people who supply logistical support at the resort need to communicate. Lift operators, ticket sellers, housekeeping, store, security, mechanics, kitchen and slope maintenance(grooming, snow makers, etc.) personnel are included in this group.

Third, ski resorts frequently sponsor ski or snowboard races to encourage patronage. They may use radios to communicate race data or other public relations information. Local radio and television stations may have a promotion van doing remote broadcasts or collecting videotape for a sports item on the news. Ski equipment or ski clothing representatives may also be present and may use radios to communicate around a large resort.

During a recent overnight visit to the Ski Liberty resort in southern Pennsylvania near Emmitsburg, I collected a number of operational frequencies. On past visits to Liberty I found a couple basic frequencies but I knew more existed. I was looking forward to spending an extended time period to scan for additional frequencies.

For equipment I used my broad shotgun Bearcat 800A scanner, an Optoelectronics R11 Test Receiver, a Radio Shack Pro-26, a Radio Shack frequency counter and my Alinco two-meter transceiver. I used the standard rubber ducky or a short whip that came with the Bearcat scanner for antennas.

My plan consisted of two parts. With the Bearcat, I would scan the 450-470 and 148-173 MHz bands in my room for possible hits and verify the frequency or put the frequency into the Pro-26 or the two-meter transceiver for verification.

The other option was to hang out with the R11, Pro-26 and the frequency counter at the three 450 MHz antennas Liberty has at the top of the hill that I suspected were repeaters. I had two frequencies and assumed one was missing. By getting close to the tower I could catch the missing frequency with the R11 and/or the frequency counter. It was fun making a run, riding the lift back to the top where I stood next to the antennas in a snowstorm reading the frequency counter and repeating that cycle a few times.

Since I had a couple of known frequencies, I had a starting point from which to work. Although I thought I wouldn't be surprised, I was in a couple of cases. The biggest surprise involved the frequencies I had thought to be repeater inputs. Since I don't have CTCSS analytical capabilities, I couldn't get the apparent sub-audible tone to key the repeater.

Ski Liberty (in Fairfield) and Ski Roundtop (in Lewisberry) are licensed on almost the identical set of frequencies with two exceptions:

154.6s (Roundtop only), 461.05r, 464.325r, 464.7625s, 464.775r and 464.875s (Liberty only).

The Whitetail Resort (in Mercersburg) holds licenses for 462.125s, 464.325r, 464.425r, 464.475r, 464.675r, 464.775r and 464.975r.

Here are my finds from Ski Liberty:

154.600	s	Shop and Re sort Security
457.050		Possibly an input to 461.05
461.050	r	Slope Groomers and Snowboard Race
464.325	r	Ski Patrol and Operations
464.3375		Not confirmed
464.775	r	Ski Patrol and Operations
464.7875		Not confirmed

With the exception of 461.05, which may have had an input of 457.05, other repeater inputs are the standard 5 MHz higher. Most of the conversations I monitored were ordinary operations information. Frequently, somebody would call and ask for a call back via telephone, so I don't know what they discussed. I enjoyed listening to the slope groomers in the morning so I could tell what to expect when I first went out. During the evening I caught a report of an injured skier and listened to the ski patrol as they coordinated bringing in the injured skier.

On Sunday, the computer system went down and there was conversation regarding the fact that the lift personnel would have to accept hand-written tickets. During the snowboard races I monitored the officials setting up the course and then the races. One of the lifts goes right over the snowboard course so I literally monitored the races from above. I visually confirmed a race official using 461.05 as I listened to him on my Pro-26 and the R11.

I enjoyed monitoring the frequencies and when I go back to Liberty in the next few weeks I will know where to start to further refine my data bank. Also, when I go to other ski areas I will have a knowledge of where to start listening for their frequencies.

TOURING WILCOM

by John Korman
(89421@UDel.Edu)

Entering the Public Safety Building in Wilmington, Delaware, it became obvious to me that this was not only where the city's police dispatch (known as "WilCom") is located, but also where calltakers receive 9-1-1 calls on the second floor. This building, at Fourth and Walnut streets, is where Wilmington police officers hold their briefings, where criminals are booked and placed in a holding cell, and where most of the department's administrative activity occurs.

Speaking to my tour host through a bullet-proof glass window, I knew I would be in for a treat as he buzzed me in. My Wilcom tour guide was Mr. Kozicki, the platoon supervisor. I walked up to the second floor where we entered Wilcom -- a single open room with two rows of five consoles, and two separate rooms for the supervisor and computer checks.

Each platoon has three call-takers (who may or may not be cross trained as dispatchers), a dispatcher (cross trained as a call-taker), and a supervisor (the person who knows it all). Two call-takers answer the ten 9-1-1 lines, the "drug line," and other non-emergency lines. Call-takers sit directly in front of the single dispatcher, who sits comfortably in the back row handling all radio traffic except for those officers who need warrant checks on vehicles and persons.

Officers needing computer checks signal on the main talk-group (channel "A") to the single dispatcher, then switch to an alternate channel and talk to a different person, the third call-taker if need be, in the "data room" which is a side room off the main WilCom room. There, a dispatcher runs the "10-28" and "10-29" requests. Once completed, officers signal they are back on the main channel.

The equipment is fairly old with each console designed by none other than Motorola. The phone lines are enhanced 9-1-1, with direct push buttons to surrounding agencies including New Castle County fire (Fireboard), police (NewCom) and state police (ReCom). All 9-1-1 calls for Wilmington are answered at this

location. But on the sixth ring the call is transferred to a different 9-1-1 agency in the state automatically.

During my stay from 18:00 to 21:00, there were no less than nine calls pending. The dispatcher enters a call type and a priority code and the computer software organizes the priority of pending calls. Everything is color coded from when units are EN ROUTE, ON SCENE, CLEARED, or other dispositions officers call out with. A call is automatically sent to the dispatcher handling all radio traffic when the call-taker gets down to COMPLAINANT'S NAME.

If additional notes are added, a high-lighted bar shows up along the screen to signify to the dispatcher that additional notes have been added by the call-taker on that specific incident. Though my shift was from 18:00-21:00, the fulltimers work rotating shifts starting from 07:00-16:00 for four days and off for three, then start up again at 14:00-23:00 for four days and off three, etc. As you can tell, for a period of time, two platoons overlap around the clock. Each "dispatching platoon" works the same schedule as the police officers themselves.

During my three-hour visit, it did get quite busy with as many as four 9-1-1 lines ringing simultaneously. I found it strange that an incoming 9-1-1 call would not be transferred to a different agency sooner than five rings. The three call-takers and the dispatcher, who cannot answer the phone because of the amount of radio traffic, face staffing problems similar to District of Columbia police dispatchers. It amazes me why there are not more dispatchers for each platoon. Maybe that is why there is a class of recruits training now.

Wilmington operates on an analog 800 MHz Motorola Type I trunked system with a user-defined fleet map of b0=S12 b2=S12 b4=S12 b6=S12.

Frequencies are 856.2625, 856.7625, 857.2625, 857.7625, 858.7625, 859.7625 and 860.7625.

TrunkTracker Talkgroups
000-1 A: Police Dispatch
000-2 B: Police Data/Info
000-3 C: Police Tactical
000-4 D: Police Tactical
000-5 E: Police Tactical
000-6 F: Police Tactical
000-7 G: Police Tactical
200-1 A: Fire/EMS Dispatch
200-2 B: Fireground
200-3 C: Fireground
200-4 D: Fire Marshal/Tac
200-5 E: Fire Supervisors
200-6 F: Fire Supervisors
400-1 Maintenance
400-2 Midtown Security
400-4 Maintenance
400-5 Licenses & Bldg Insp
400-6 Parking Enforcement
600-1 Port Operations
600-4 Port Operations

MORE REALAUDIO

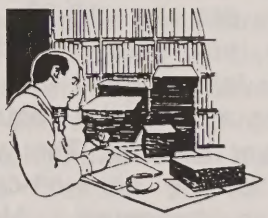
Last issue we reported that Real Audio for Prince George's County and the District fire departments is available through:

http://www.hyattsvillevfd.org/
or
http://www.riverdalevfd.org/

This month Mike Agner says he found a website,

http://speed.nimh.nih.gov/listener/ralistener.html

where websurfers can listen to most any frequency in the area. You can click on a box to listen to amateur radio, weather, aviation or you may enter your own frequency.



NEWSSCAN

FCC BANS RADAR JAMMERS. The February Autocall says the FCC has decided that all traffic radar jamming devices are illegal. This includes the so-called passive reflector types and those which generate jamming signals by themselves. One manufacturer argued that the FCC has no regulatory authority over its product because it does not generate, emit or work on radio signals. The FCC, however, says the device captures a radio frequency signal and then generates and emits a different RF signal. As far as the FCC is concerned, that makes it a transmitter.

GOOD PRESS FOR BALTIMORE POLICE DISPATCHERS. Van Johnson and John

McCall rarely see the people they talk to every day, but they are among the best known employees within the Baltimore Police Department, reports the Jan. 27 Baltimore Sun. "Their unique voices, biting wit and calming influence have made them stars of police radio," the article states. "Their sayings have become legendary -- not only imitated but absorbed into the daily vernacular of police-speak. Johnson, 48, might be one of the few people who is asked to stand at parties to recite what otherwise would be a dry radio transmission about a computer search.

"There are no 10-27s, no 10-28s, no 10-29s. Nothing. Nada," Johnson told the Sun, spouting a phrase he frequently uses over the radio. The words have become his oft-copied signature- trademark. McCall had to spice up mundane hourly broadcasts that officers were required to wear their seat belts, a rule often overlooked on the street. "All units," McCall began, "please remember to buckle up so you can hear this announcement tomorrow." His voice "rarely changes pitch, but he keeps the subject matter interesting, and often funny. He breeds confidence, familiarity and cooperation... And he's always in control," the article adds.

McCall sounds like a "fan at a baseball game commenting on the unfolding action. But he speaks like the enemy in pinstripes, delivering quick jabs and observances that credit mundane happenings with cosmic significance." Johnson's voice is so distinct that once, while buying batteries in a Radio Shack, a woman behind him in line heard him talk to the clerk and said, "I know you. You are in my house all the time." The woman said her husband had a police scanner. "He gets up every morning and turns you on."

HAMS LOOK FOR LOST SATELLITE. The Jan. 11 All Things Considered featured an interview with Larry Van Horn, editor of Satellite Times, discussing a private satellite company that had lost a satellite in orbit and asked the amateur radio community for assistance finding it. In December a firm named Earth Watch launched a commercial satellite called Early Bird that can take photographs of the earth similar to those taken by defense satellites. Earth Watch said it will sell the photos to anybody who's willing to pay for them -- that is, if they ever get the satellite working.

A few days after Early Bird went into orbit, it stopped transmitting signals. Executives are hoping that Early Bird is only sick, not dead, and that it will eventually communicate with them again. And just to make sure that somebody's listening if it does, they sent a message out over the Internet asking people who track satellites for fun to tune into the satellite's frequency and join the search. The exciting thing about the search is that it's like "looking for Easter eggs, and not knowing where they're hidden," Van Horn observed, adding that "you have this large frequency range that you can find a particular satellite in."

NEW YORK CITY'S DISASTER PLANNER. Jerry Hauer is Mayor Giuliani's top emergency troubleshooter. He drives a black Ford Crown Victoria equipped with emergency lights, spare clothes, flashlights, throw ropes and chemical antidote kits. Hauer, 46, as the head of the Office of Emergency Management, is responsible for planning, responding to and recovering from city emergencies. But Hauer also acts as an interagency referee and has led city projects such as rat eradication in the Bronx, beetle infestation in Brooklyn and the cleanup of a dangerous mold in Staten Island.

His office, writes the Jan. 10 New York Daily News, has crafted detailed evacuation plans, checked hurricane shelters in every borough and started "one-stop-shopping" disaster assistance centers. His office responds to about 100 incidents a month and spends a third of its time planning for terrorism. On his desk amid hefty books on chemical and biological warfare is a secure phone to the Pentagon and the State Department. Nearby are seven radios, scanners, beepers and cellular phones. And in the massive bus that serves as his agency's on-scene command center, Hauer has satellite phones and a periscope camera for secure indoor viewing of an outdoor disaster.

Born and raised in New York City, Hauer is a former volunteer firefighter whose first job was as a morgue technician. With a degree from Johns Hopkins Uni-

versity's School of Hygiene and Public Health and teaching stints at Harvard Medical School, he has spent a lifetime putting out fires of one kind or another. After graduate school, Hauer took a job with IBM in what was then its biomedical division. From there, it was emergency management jobs all the way, including the Iowa floods, Hurricane Andrew and two California earthquakes.

HENRICO COUNTY GETS MOBILE DATA. In January, the first batch of "ruggedized" notebook computers, modeled after combat-style computers used by the U.S. military, arrived for Henrico County police cars. The county, reports the Jan. 4 Richmond Times Dispatch, is the first Richmond area law enforcement agency to computerize its field operations. By fall, a total of 230 of the thick-skinned mobile data computers should be on-line in patrol cars.

The laptops have software that allows officers to make instantaneous license and vehicle checks, write reports, find out what's happening on their beats, check items sold at local pawn shops, check people wanted for crimes and use e-mail, among other things. The $5.1 million project will eventually allow police to transmit pictures and fingerprints of suspects to patrol cars from central computers.

Henrico's computers, manufactured by Cycomm International of McLean, have been designed to perform under severe operating conditions. The durable magnesium-alloy housing is designed to be spill-and shock-proof. They purportedly can withstand a drop on concrete from a height of 3 feet, a sharp kick from an unruly prisoner and deflect a small-caliber bullet without crashing, at least permanently. The keyboard is sealed with gaskets and silicon to withstand spills, such as coffee and soda. And its shock resistant touch screen can be smashed without causing damage to the computer. The manufacturer says it can also withstand extreme heat and cold.

The laptops also have full-color touch screens that are backlit with illuminated keyboards, so officers don't need an overhead light that would silhouette them in their cars at night. The units are powered by a 133-MHz 586 processor with a 520 MB removable hard drive. The 586 chip is equivalent to an Intel Pentium, which can't be used in the units because they are sealed. A Pentium chip must be fan-cooled. Henrico paid $10,789 for each laptop, but the price includes such things as software packages, modems and a variety of startup costs.

The computer transmits and receives information via radio modem at 19.2 kps, or 9600 baud. Henrico's system was designed by Unisys Corp and taps Ram Mobile Data Communication's network to send wireless text messages between patrol cars and headquarters, as well as other destinations. Using the Ram system, officers can send and receive information beyond the range of Henrico's emergency radio network, including locations across the country. Police said the system is secure. It's possible some information could be captured during transmission, but would be difficult to decipher since the data is transmitted in fragments.

After the police are equipped, the county plans to outfit other public safety agencies, such as the fire and sheriff's departments. Other county agencies may follow. Richmond police also plan to install laptops in patrol cars at a slower pace. Officials are preparing a pilot program in Southside with about 15 computers. Henrico and Richmond have been coordinating their efforts to mesh the two different communications systems.

SCHOOL OFFICIAL CONVICTED OF EAVESDROPPING. In January, a Ventura County, Calif. jury convicted Oxnard School District administrator Pedro R. Placencia of six felony counts of illegally eavesdropping, intercepting and recording the telephone calls made by board member James Suter. According to the Jan. 22 Los Angeles Times, a search warrant served on Placencia's home turned up a tape recorder and radio scanner like the one used to record Suter's conversations.

A related search warrant, served at trustee Mary Barreto's home, turned up two 90-minute cassette tapes containing 18 of Suter's private telephone conversations. Barreto told authorities the tapes were anonymously left on her doorstep. After discovering them, she reportedly played one for fellow trustee Arthur Joe Lopez. Lopez alerted school district officials, who informed police. Barreto was initially a target of the investigation into the matter, but the Ventura County Grand Jury found insufficient evidence to support an indictment.

GRAND JURORS CRITICIZE POLICE USE OF CELL PHONES. Officers in Omaha and other cities call the cellular phone invaluable, says the Jan. 30 Omaha World-Herald, but a grand jury in Omaha was frustrated by police use of the phones in the aftermath of a fatal police shooting of a citizen. The grand jury returned a manslaughter indictment against the officer. Attached to the indictment was a list of five recommendations to the police, one of which took aim at the use of cellular phones. The grand jury said it found that cell phones were used by officers investigating the shooting "in lieu of normal police communication channels."

The grand jury's work is done in secret, so it's not known what piece of evidence or testimony raised concerns among jurors over the cellular-phone use. The special prosecutor who presented evidence to the grand jury said the jurors were concerned that the use of cellular technology kept some evidence off the record. Transmissions made over police radios are taped in the 9-1-1 center but cellular phone conversations are not. Sam Walker, a criminal justice professor at University of Nebraska at Omaha, said the jury put its finger on some serious questions, but without more information from the jury, it's unclear what the exact problems are.

AREA CELL PHONE THEFT IS BIG BUSINESS. Cellular telephones have become a prime target for thieves in the Washington area. According to the Dec. 22 Washington Post, cellular providers are losing millions in air time because the stolen phones are reprogrammed with pirated telephone numbers and resold. In most cases, thieves don't use the phones themselves. Instead, they make $10 to $20 for each unit by selling them to people who reprogram, or "clone," the phones and resell them.

Secret Service officials say the cloned phones often are sold to customers for $50 to $100. In the Baltimore area, police say the reprogrammed phones can go for as much as $150 to $175. If a customer brings his own phone to get cloned, the cloner charges $75. Cloners may guarantee a phone for only two weeks to a month, because the phones with the stolen numbers frequently get shut off once the real owner gets the bill or the cellular company detects cloning with increasingly sophisticated computer equipment. If the phone gets shut off, the cloner reprograms the phone with another stolen number to fulfill the guarantee.

Since January, the Secret Service has broken up six cloning operations in the District and Prince George's, Montgomery and Fairfax counties that reprogrammed thousands of phones, some of which were stolen locally from cars. D.C. police estimate that more than 300 cell phones are snatched monthly from parked vehicles. In Alexandria, police say 28 percent, or about 300, of the 1,100 car break-ins last year involved cell phone theft. In Fairfax City, roughly a third of the 187 thefts from cars this year involved cell phones.

METRO BUS/RAIL TO INSTALL CELL PHONES. Cellular phones will be installed in hundreds of Metro trains and buses under a year-long pilot program to improve rider services and boost revenue. Under the cellular phone program, states the Feb. 13 Washington Post, riders will be able to use an onboard cellular phone by swiping a credit or debit card through a slot. The service will be through Bell Atlantic, which installed a leaky coax antenna system in subway tunnels two years ago.

Phones will be anchored next to the end doors of rail cars and at an undetermined location aboard buses. The program calls for outfitting about 120 rail cars and about 130 buses with one phone each. Cars and buses with phones on board are to be marked with a logo. Metro officials have not chosen a supplier or negotiated a contract for the pilot program, so it's unclear how much a phone call will cost. Metro is the first urban transit system in the country to try such a cell phone service, so there is little information available to predict how successful the experiment will be.

Virginia Railway Express has had some success with cell phone service and claims it does not make money from it. VRE commuters pay a 99-cent connection fee and $1.25 per minute to use phones installed a year ago on each of VRE's 50 rail cars. Under Metro's pilot program, the transit agency will solicit proposals from telephone manufacturers who must agree to provide, install, repair and remove the equipment. There will be no cost to Metro for the 12-month pilot program which is

expected to begin in October.

TOWERS COMING SOON TO A PARK NEAR YOU? Telecommunications companies, with the support of Congress, are searching Rock Creek Park for tower sites that will allow cellular phone use in even the remotest parts of the heavily forested park in Northwest Washington. The move comes at a time when industry officials say they need to respond to customers' demands for uninterrupted service anywhere in the Washington area.

Places like Rock Creek Park, says the Feb. 11 Washington Post, are what they call "dead zones," areas where calls either cannot be placed or are cut short because antennas located outside the park do not reach into the park. Rock Creek Park had received the most interest but cellular companies have also inquired about building towers along the C&O Canal and the Suitland and Baltimore Washington parkways.

In December, Robert Stanton, director of the National Park Service, issued instructions to Park Service superintendents telling them how to comply with the provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. In his directive, Stanton said the act requires federal agencies to develop procedures to make federal property available for wireless communication services. "Through their actions, Congress and the President have established a compelling Federal interest in promoting the efficient implementation of the new telecommunications technology," Stanton wrote.

Bell Atlantic Mobile moved quickly to investigate sites in Rock Creek Park after Stanton sent out his directive. The company is investigating two picnic areas toward the north end of the park, a maintenance yard near Military Road and the tennis center at 16th and Kennedy streets NW. The company's records indicate that about 3,000 calls a month placed by its customers are interrupted in the park.

BOY ACCUSED OF PRANKS OVER POLICE RADIO. A 13-year-old Illinois boy, writes the Jan. 30 Chicago Tribune, was arrested by police after he was caught transmitting bogus messages on a local police channel. The boy reportedly told police he mail-ordered the portable radio from a company in Kansas City, Mo. for $150. He was caught allegedly red-handed by a firefighter, who is also a police officer, who was listening to his scanner when he heard the prankster send out a request for license plate information on a car that happened to be parked next door.

Please address all correspondence to Alan. We encourage readers to submit material and write articles that relate to the hobby. All submissions are subject to editing for style and content. When submitting material please make certain we can contact you should we have any questions. We welcome frequency and visitor requests, but please include a reply envelope.

Contact:
Alan Henney
6912 Prince George's Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912-5414
301-270-2531 (voice)
301-270-5774 (fax)

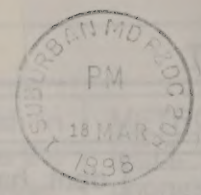
Newsletter Staff:
Dr. Willard Hardman, Executive Editor
(hardman1@ix.netcom.com)
Mike Peyton, Technical Advisor
(Michael.Peyton@mci.com)
Ken Fowler, Northern Virginia Correspondent
(kfowler1@osf1.gmu.edu)
Alan Henney, Editor & Treasurer
(henney@gwis2.circ.gwu.edu)

The Capitol Hill Monitor is the non-profit newsletter of the *Capitol Hill Monitors*. The newsletter keeps scanner enthusiasts abreast of local meetings, frequency profiles and other topics of interest. Dues are $10 and include 12 issues (back issues cost $1 each). Kindly make checks payable to Alan Henney. Membership will be prorated accordingly in the event of a postage increase.

Join Local Scanner Enthusiasts On-Line!
We encourage computer users to take part in discussions on Frank Carson's Open Channel computer BBS (301-203-8478) or subscribe to the Scan-DC listserv by sending an e-mail to majordomo@qth.net with the words "subscribe scan-dc" (no quotes) as the message.

The Capitol Hill Monitor

6912 Prince Georges Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912



[redacted]

20912-3414 14